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ABSTRACT

The focus of the articles in this theme issue of a journal for librarians and teachers working with young children is storytelling. The first article, "Observations on Storytelling," (K. Roberts) relates how storytelling can be essential to reading--if one observes the law of diminishing returns. The second article, "How to Turn a Story Hour Into a Family Outing," (M. Silveus) describes a bedtime story program from Monroe County, Indiana. The third article, "Learning Them By Heart," (B. Barton) urges the storyteller not to memorize the stories, but to learn them "by heart." Picture books and drama as powerful tools for language development are discussed in the fourth article, "Creating Pictures in Time and Space" (D. Booth). The fifth article, "The Medford Storytelling Guild, or, 'Volunteers Unlimited'," (P. Blair) describes the voluntary storytelling guild (with a membership of 360) established by the Jackson County, Oregon, Library. (HOD)

# Emergency Librarian

Volume 10, Number 2 November-December, 1982





# STORYTELLING

## WITH ARTICLES BY

## Ken Roberts, Mari Silveus, Bob Barton, David Booth and Pat Blair

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# In This Issue...



## Emergency Librarian Advisory Board

# Guest Editorial

Every few months somebody walks into the library and with minor variation, says: "You're the man who tells stories, right?"

"Yes."

"Well, I have three children. I read to them every night."

"Good."

"Yeah. Anyway, a couple of weeks ago, I began telling them a story I made up. It's their favorite now. They like it more than any of the stories from library books. Will you read it please?"

I do of course. And sometimes the story is quite good. Sometimes it's quite oad. But most frequently, it is quite ordinary. Still, I have little doubt that each of these stories are indeed home favorites. They are, after all, told with infectious enthusiasm.

I have heard many librarians say "I can't tell stories. I have no sense of drama in me." But there does not have to be a flair for dramatics to be a storyteller. Libraries have proven fertile ground for storytelling because librarians frequently possess one common element with parents who succ[illegible]ly tell personal tales. Librarians, too, have that special love for the stories they relate. As a result, their oral tales are met with the same enthusiastic response.

A few months ago, I attended an informal gathering of storytellers. Many of the tellers were students presenting their final masterpieces. Although most of the stories were beautifully told, they obviously had been selected with the mind, not the heart. Near the end of the evening, a German literature student offered a story. He introduced his tale by saying that he was a great admirer of Kafka. The man then told his story. It was riveting. Technique had been conquered by commitment.

I do not worry about the librarian who has no sense of drama but I do worry about the librarian who might say, "I can't tell stories because there's no love of stories in me."

A few years ago, a woman came into the library and said, in a soft, meek voice, that she wanted to be a storyteller. She was telling stories the following day and asked if I would come and see her.

I did. I went convinced that she would not be able to control a class with her almost inaudible voice. I was wrong. She was superb. She told ghost stories and had every child leaning forward anxiously awaiting each word. More importantly, she was able to take the children to the limit of suspense and then miraculously manage to push them even closer.

I have never been able to do that. Every time I sense fear in an audience, I smile and unintentionally ruin the mood. This woman possessed a remarkable ability to maintain suspense. She will never be able to tell broad tales filled with loud, boisterous characters. She did not, however, shrug her shoulders and say, "I could never be a storyteller." Instead, her limitation became a strength.

Every teacher and librarian can, and should tell stories. Why don't you start today?

• *Ken Roberts is Head of Children's Services for the Richmond Public Library in British Columbia and a contributing editor for Emergency Librarian*

# Observations On Storytelling

*By*
*Ken Roberts*

**Storytelling And Reading**

It has always seemed to me that listening to a storyteller and reading have a lot in common. Let me explain.

Taken broadly, there are two basic skills involved in reading. One skill requires the ability to translate meaningless squiggles to sound and then to join them together to create first words and then sentences and paragraphs. Virtually every person acquires this skill, but it does not make virtually every person a "reader".

The second skill involved in reading is an imaginative ability to translate these written squiggles into mental pictures and, later, into abstract concepts. Written descriptions are sparse. They cannot describe a room or a person in detail. They suggest relevant portions of what they describe and allow each reader to flesh out the rest of the image. When we read, we recreate elements from our own experiences and work these elements into the spartan language of written stories.

Keith Johnstone, a creative dramatist writes "When I read a novel I have no sense of effort. Yet if I pay close attention to my mental processes, I find an amazing amount of activity. "She walked into the room..." I read, and I have a picture in my mind, very detailed, of a large Victorian room empty of furniture, with bare boards painted white around what used to be the edge of the carpet. I also see some windows with the shutters open and sunlight streaming through them. "She noticed some charred paper in the grate..."I read, and my mind inserts a fireplace which I've seen at a friend's house, very ornate. "A board creaked behind her..." I read, and for a split second I see a Frankenstein's monster holding a wet teddy bear. "She turned to see a little wizened old man..."Instantly, the monster shrivels to Picasso with a beret, and the room darkens and fills with furniture. My imagination is working as hard as the writer's but I have no sense of doing anything, or "being creative". [1:80]

While I have never injected "a Frankenstein's monster holding a wet teddy bear" into any description, I do know the feeling. When I see the word "bus", I tend to visualize a yellow bus with a purple trim because that is the color of buses in a town where I lived for many years. A friend from England tends to see something which is two levels tall and red. Every reader has probably seen the movie version of a novel already read. And every reader, upon seeing the movie, has probably thought that "the book was better".

*Vary style and mood and stop one sentence before our audience is ready for you to stop.*

The movie version fills in many visual details, but these reflect the author's or the director's conception of unwritten elements from the tale. Each reader, though, has created a personal set of images, images which may be at odds with what is on the screen. One reason that books are so wonderful is that they offer so few details and thus allow readers to stretch their imaginations.

Authors and storytellers are closely related. Both use words to tell their tale. Because they cannot relay complete images--as does a movie or a play--they rely on their audience to supply mental images.

I stress these similarities because my desire, when telling stories, is to create strong mental images in the mind of the listener. By reading and telling stories to young people we are preparing their imaginative natures, nurturing their ability to create images in the mind. We are helping them to acquire that second skill so necessary to reading.

Read and tell stories to children

when they are babies, and they will love the colors and shapes of illustrations and the relaxed mood of your voice. Read and tell stories to children when they are toddlers, and they will shiver at the recognition of animals and listen with delight to rhymes. Read and tell stories to children when they are true walkers and talkers, and they will laugh at funny incidents and fall in love with special characters. Read and tell stories to children when they are in their first years of school, and they will appreciate the opportunity to retreat from learning and embrace the world of relaxed imagination. Read and tell stories to older children and to adults, and they, too, will find themselves transported into the world of image and wonder.

I find it easy to advocate the telling of stories and hard to say how. There are so many ways and methods. E.M. Forster once wrote that "A story may have any fault except one--that of making its reader not want to know what happens next."

Instead of dealing with technique, I would like to reiterate some general principles. These should remain true no matter what method of telling is employed.

### The Law Of Diminishing Returns

Too much of a good thing is not so good. The message seems clear for storytellers. Don't talk too long If you tell wonderful stories for twenty-five minutes and then add a relatively short, beautifully told tale which stretches the attention span of your audience, you've lost. The next time stories are suggested as a potential activity, the idea will be met with less than an enthusiastic response.

The teacher who realizes that recess can be reached by acceding to the demand for "one more story" may be making a mistake. The librarian who stretches storytimes to pacify parents attempting to justify the effort they've spent dressing the children in snowsuits and buckling them into car seats may also be making a mistake. If the purpose of telling stories is to excite listeners, then the length of each session must be determined solely by the ers' attention and interest.

*By reading and telling stories to young people we are preparing their imaginative natures, nurturing their ability to create images in the mind.*

The Law of Diminishing Returns can also be applied to the content of a storytelling session. Storytellers who limit themselves to only one style of presentation or type of story will find the Law of Diminishing Returns in full effect. The first story will be enjoyed, and subsequent stories will be increasingly less effective.

When telling stories to young children, my first story is the least active of those selected for the occasion. I may simply sit and tell. The second story could include a puppet or an active finger play--something to offer visual variety. The third story may require vocal participation from the audience. The fourth story might require physical involvement from those present.

Maintaining uniformly high interest, right to the inpenetrable barrier of saturation, can be solved in a variety of different ways. Varying the style of storytelling is only one method. It is also possible, for example, to vary the types of stories being told. I tend to use this technique more frequently when telling stories to older audiences.

Arthur Koestler once suggested that there are only three types of funny stories. There are the "Ha Ha Stories", "Aha Stories" of discovery, and "Ah Stories" which are sublime.[2] Storytelling sessions can be made more interesting if two or even all three types of stories are represented within a single session.

In summary: *vary style and mood* and *stop one sentence before your audience is ready for you to stop.*

Storytelling is exciting and involving--it is also within the grasp of every teacher and librarian. Share stories and storytelling with both children and adults.

• *Ken Roberts is Head of Children's Services for the Richmond Public Library in British Columbia and a contributing editor for* ***Emergency Librarian.***

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2. Koestler. Arthur. *Janus: A Summing Up.* London: Hutchison and Company. 1978.

### Suggested Titles

Here are some of my own favourite "ha ha", "aha", and "ah" stories.

**Who's In The Rabbit's House,** by Verna Aardema. Dial, 1979. *(Ha ha, Aha).*

**The Desert Is Theirs,** by Byrd Baylor. Scribner, 1975. Pb: Atheneum. *(Ah).*

**Don't Forget The Bacon!,** by Pat Hutchins. Greenwillow, 1976. Pb: Penguin, 1978. *(Ha ha).*

**The Porcelain Man,** by Richard Kennedy. Little, 1976. *(Ah).*

**Just So Stories,** by Rudyard Kipling. Smith, 1980. *(Ha ha, Aha)*

**The Quangle Wangle's Hat,** by Edward Lear. Illus. by Helen Oxenbury. Watts, 1969. *(Ha ha).*

**Fish Is Fish,** by Leo Lionni. Pantheon, 1970. *(Ha ha, Aha).*

**Too Much Noise,** by Ann McGovern. Houghton Mifflin, 1967. *(Ha ha, Aha).*

**Yummers,** by James Marshall. Houghton Mifflin, 1973. *(Ha ha).*

**Mud Puddle,** by Robert Munsch. Annick Press. *(Ha ha).*

**Where The Wild Things Are,** by Maurice Sendak. Harper and Row, 1963. *(Ha ha, Aha, Ah).*

**Dawn,** by Uri Shulevitz. Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1974. *(Ah).*

**Hubert: The Caterpillar Who Thought He Was A Moustache,** by Wendy Stang and Susan Richards. Quist, 1967. *(Ha ha).*

**How Far Will A Rubber Band Stretch?,** by Mike Thaler. Parents, 1974. *(Ha ha, Aha).*

# How to Turn a Story Hour Into a Family Outing

*By*
*Mari Silveus*

Dressed in pyjamas, carrying stuffed animals and tugging blankets, the children, with their parents, walk into the library's dimly lighted auditorium. A red-headed man in the moon, made of cardboard, smiles at them and sways on a black curtain above the stage. Two guitarists are performing and singing lullabies. For thirty minutes the children will hear stories, practise fingerplays, or sign language.

Six years ago, the Monroe County (Indiana) Public Library began Bedtime Story Hours. Since then, innovative librarians have developed new management and publicity techniques that have turned the common library story hour into a popular family outing.

The program originated as an alternative to the library's traditional, school-year story hour for three, four and five-year-olds. The goals were to have a summer evening activity for both children and parents that would develop listening and sequencing skills and encourage bedtime reading.

Now, story hours attracts about seventy people a week. The program's popularity can be explained since the child learns a fingerplay and the parent retains the fingerplay and can show the child again at home.

Bedtime Story Hours, for two to six-year-old children, crosses a wider age span than the traditional program, and frequently ten and eleven-year-olds accompany the toddlers. Because of this varied age group, the librarians have learned to manage the program through selective content and organized planning. The stories they choose, for example, must appeal to both a two and a six-year-old. Taken from folklore or picture books, two stories are told by librarians. The librarians believe that telling, rather than reading, has a more personal effect on a large audience. Each week both stories relate to a new theme. "Noise In The Night", by Anne Alexander, for example, and Pat Hutchins' "Good Night Owl" are told for the theme night noises. Between stories, children do fingerplays. For Robert Kraus' "Good Night Little One", they mime tucking ten little ones into bed. They also have learned how to tell "Twinkle Twinkle Little Star" and nursery rhymes in sign language.

*Parent participation is the key ingredient for managing story hours through content and planning.*

As each story hour ends, a star is added to the curtain next to the man in the moon, and the guitarists resume playing and singing. Music cues the children to the program's beginning, and with the star, to its ending. Music substantially improves content, the librarians believe. Children become more receptive when they hear music; it quiets them and prepares them for storytelling. As the children leave, many stop by a table to pick up booklists and check out books pertaining to the theme.

Parent participation is the key ingredient for managing story hours through content and planning. The parents are there to interact with their child to help the child with a fingerplay, to draw back the child's attention when it wanders, and when there are lullabies, the parents are there to rock the baby. Similarly, dur-

ing a session on new sign language, parents begin to help their children by learning sign language themselves. Since children who come without parents or guardians may feel neglected, the library staff simply tell the parents that story hours are parent/child programs. That approach usually works. Parents who regularly attend with their children are also more inclined to become involved with other library activities.

What is being offered, of course, must be worth a person's time, even for a one-year-old. A publicity campaign may bring people in for the first story hour, but without good content they won't come back. The librarians agree, however, that publicity is essential to the program's ongoing success. One year, for instance, the library had radio spots at the beginning of series but didn't do weekly follow-ups. Many people came to the community after the start and didn't know about story hours until it was nearly over. They didn't have the attendance that year that they've had in later years.

Every library has different publicity needs so it is very important to know the community.

Story hours' publicity begins with a cover letter and brochure, describing all summer programs, that are sent to fifty county agencies dealing with children. Other pre-program publicity is carried out prior to registration, which is one week before the first story hour.

The brochure, dressed up with drawings by the library's artist-in-residence, costs about $50 for 1,000 copies. Paid with donations from Friends of the Library, the brochure's cost is spread through all children's programs. The major expenditure is for handouts, which describe a story hour and extend it to home activities. These publications also become a form of publicity; persons who hear about a handout that interests them often come to the library. There also is a small fee for printing booklists. The overall cost for publicizing story hours, however, is minimal, and the librarians depend on inexpensive or free materials.

Public service radio announcements are aired by three stations throughout the summer. Each week the library sends announcements, on three by five index cards, to the stations. Sometimes a broadcaster will be so taken with an event that he'll talk about it all day. This happened when the library invited children to come and meet Jessica, a six-foot boa constrictor.

The local newpaper also publicizes story hours under the weekly "fun" column.

In-house publicity is one poster used all summer, but the new theme is inserted each week.

Word-of-mouth publicity is beneficial but it has to be developed. People see pyjama clad children walking into the library with blankets and stuffed animals. Inevitably they say, "What is going on here?" The pyjamas certainly make the audience identifiable! When people see the children they realize that they're a group ready to do something. When the children arrive it's like a mini-fashion show. They look each other up and down, but they soon forget they're wearing pyjamas.

If you are planning to start a story hour don't expect success right away. It takes two or three years to build clientele. You have to understand the parents and they have to understand you. At the beginning of story hours, for example, parents and even storytellers were embarrassed because the stories were for a young audience. The storyteiler must overcome whatever embarrassment the parents feel.

Bedtime Story Hours is evaluated by attendance figures and whether or not it meets its goals. But the best kind of evaluation is when a mother comes to the library and says, "My daughter started to tell me a bedtime story at lunch the other day and she forgot it. So now, we need the book."

• *Mari Silveus is a free-lance writer in Bloomington, Indiana.*

# Learning Them By Heart

*By*
*Bob Barton*

*"The tale is not beautiful if nothing is added to it."*

*Tuscan Proverb* [1]

Of all the questions put to me by both children and adults after telling stories, the one which occurs with amazing frequency is, "How did you memorize those stories?" I usually reply that I don't memorize them, but learn them by heart. The perplexed looks that follow demand further explanation and I go on to say that for me storytelling has more to do with "building" than with memorizing.

That building begins immediately a story commences. I remember hearing Harold Rosen say, "The real author of narrative is not only he who tells, but he who listens. There is no real consumer of stories."

A story that truly grips our imagination causes us to build in our mind's eye the images triggered by the words. The world of the story will probably not be one with which we are familiar. It will be necessary for us to draw for our internal scrapbooks the material for our construct. As the story moves forward the images will be revised and reshaped as we remember, ponder, speculate, anticipate, and live in and through that story in our heads.

Small wonder that at the conclusion of some stories we can't absorb any more! Stories place demands on us. Most of all they demand that we respond as storytellers, shading in the outlines, and filling in the detail from our personal storehouse of memories, impressions, and observations.

Memorizing a story's plot or its details word for word does not constitute storytelling for me. Rather, in the words of poet Ted Hughes, the story must be taken on as a "unit of imagination". Before sharing a story with others, that story must be revisited again and again. Moving back and forth between the world of the story and my own collection of life experiences, the story is built up, layer by layer. By the time you are ready to tell that story it's your whole life you're telling.

Telling a story is a labour of love, but it also requires great courage. When a story has been explored so that both its surface and its inner meanings are understood, there accompanies the telling a quiet confidence which guarantees that the experience will be memorable.

Of course each of us will take on a story in a different way and each story will demand a different approach, but I think what is important is well stated by Italo Calvino in his introduction to the *Italian Folktales:* "The tale is not beautiful if nothing is added to it." In other words, its value consists in what is woven and rewoven into it. I, too, have thought of myself as a link in the anonymous chain without end by which folktales are handed down, links that are never merely instruments or passive transmitters but--and here the proverb meets Benedetto Croce's theory about popular poetry--its real "authors".[1]

Storytelling is currently enjoying considerable interest on a variety of fronts, not the least of which is the schools. Storytellers are being invited into many classrooms and storytelling clubs are being formed by interested teachers and librarians for pupils. While I find all this activity very encouraging, I hope that children are also having opportunities to explore their responses to stories in open exploratory ways. Nurturing, sustaining, and encouraging the kind of inquiry that helps them to understand more deeply must surely be central to the work with stories.

What follows is an example of the kind of story exploration I carry out with adults or children in order that we might discover as much about a story as we can. For the purpose of these

communal explorations, I find nursery rhymes very effective. Nursery rhymes constitute some of the most powerful and exciting story miniatures one could wish for. I am also keen that people realize that far from being bits of nonsense, these elliptical tales have lives of their own and extensive family trees with relatives throughout the globe.

Let's consider this little-known example:

*On Saturday night*
*I lost my wife*
*and where do you*
*think I found her?*
*Up in the moon,*
*singing a tune*
*with all the stars*
*around her.*

For the most part, storytellers find their material in books. As an initial step in taking on a story, several readings are necessary. By the time a story has been read slowly five or six times, I find that giving it back in my own words is possible. Revisiting the story to check on significant details and turns of phrase, beautiful words or recurring verses is important to building the surface structure.

Continuous rereading of a short nursery rhyme with a group could quickly become monotonous and boring so a variety of ways of exploring the lines must be found. Sometimes we chant in unison to skipping rope rhythms, orchestrate them chorally, employing many solo voices and group parts or sing them to familiar tunes such as "Row Your Boat" or "London Bridge Is Falling Down".

Other means of lingering at the surface involve the inventing of ritual movement to accompany the words. Many of the stories from the oral tradition were accompanied by actions, or movement sequences. In some instances, a story's passage through time has resulted in either the loss of movement pattern or the loss of story details. For example, the singing game *Draw A Bucket Of Water*[4] doesn't provide us with much in the way of story, but contains an intricate sequence of movement and a lively tune. Could it be that "Saturday Night" once had a pattern of movement to accompany words?

We divide into small groups and invent movement or action sequences. Out of the activity emerge dance-like rituals, some resembling little square dances, others more stylized and dramatic. Many of the inventions are game-like and have the characteristics of spontaneous playground activity with chants and feats of physical prowess.

Storytelling is about using the oral tradition and that involves not only voice and gesture, but what we bring to a story with imagination.

As we move from the lines to the spaces between the lines we must exerploring the possibilities for the voice or, to be more precise, role playing with the voice offers a creative challenge.

***A story that truly grips our imagination causes us to build in our mind's eye the images triggered by the words.***

In a recent *New York Times* article, writer Maureen Howard examined the reasons why she had become a writer and related some of her early encounters with language:

*An actor manque, my father had one routine that was magic and, though he never guessed it, was the essence of the storyteller's art--worthy of Borges or Beckett. When he was going out someplace in particular, he'd stage his departure. Standing at the door in his coat and hat, he'd say: "I'm going away, but before I go I have something to say." And that is all he said, the one simple line circling back on itself. He said it with measured solemnity, with a hush of terror, with pride, pomposity, with tenderness--"I'm going away..." He put down his hat, unbuttoned his coat as if reconsidering but then, launched again with full resolve, hearty, upbeat, fearless, "I'm going away..." Nothing followed. Neither plot or meaning. It was all in the performance, what he invested in and yielded from a few silly words.*[7]

It's all in the performance! How important it is to build up a reservoir of possible interpretations so that everyone realizes that the manner in which the words are spoken can actually alter the meaning. I ask the group to try and imagine someone who spoke the words of our story long ago, and to give back the words in the manner which that person might have employed. One group of eleven-year-olds told me recently that the voice belonged to Zeus and he was seeking Hera. They proceeded to experiment with the words, speaking them through cardboard tubes used as megaphones. They were trying, they explained, for a "far off, thundering voice". Other groups have recreated the voice of a mother singing a lullaby to her baby, the voices of children performing a playground ritual for choosing up sides, a lusty tavern song performed by local townsfolk, a female astronaut's husband being interviewed by television reporters, a password employed by a secret society and a tribal enactment to call forth the new moon.

By this point, the group is usually considering the story in terms of its possibilities rather than its limitations and we quickly turn our attention to finding all the stories that lie within the boundaries of the text. As we examine the rhyme, line by line, word by word, the stories tumble out. They include the story of:

- how the wife's relatives attempted to get her back from the moon
- details surrounding the woman's journey into heavens (did she go willingly or was she kidnapped?)
- what the woman discovered in the skies and what she did about it with her singing
- the discovery by the wife that life in space did not meet her needs and her attempts to rescue herself

Sometimes we concentrate on one of the stories and decide who the storytellers are who are telling that story. Using the role playing or other dramatic techniques we construct some aspect of that story. For example in one group, it was decided that the storytellers would be the relatives of the woman trying to make contact

with her. The vehicle used to get in touch with her was sound poetry created by the group. The sound poems were sung to the woman, then individual members, reflecting back on the event years later, told what the results had been.

On another occasion, the group role-played the wife attempting to win her freedom from her sky hosts who had no way of returning her to earth.

From our wondering about and our wandering through the story, it is but a short leap into the area beyond the story where we can examine situations similar to those we have probed. One recent bout of extended reading led us from *The Star Maiden* § to *The Star Husband* [6] to *The Legend Of The Milky Way* [5] to the West African myth in Penelope Farmer's *Beginnings* [2][3][1] and finally to Ted Hughes'

*The savage tribes that have their lairs*
*In the moon's internal crater*
*Pray to the earth with savage prayers.* [3]

By now we have shared our hypotheses of the story, taken our imagined voices into it and I hope come to realize that storytelling can be an exciting process of building and discovery. We have also, I might add, learned it by heart.

• *Bob Barton is education officer with the Ontario Ministry of Education in Toronto and a well-known storyteller and teacher.*

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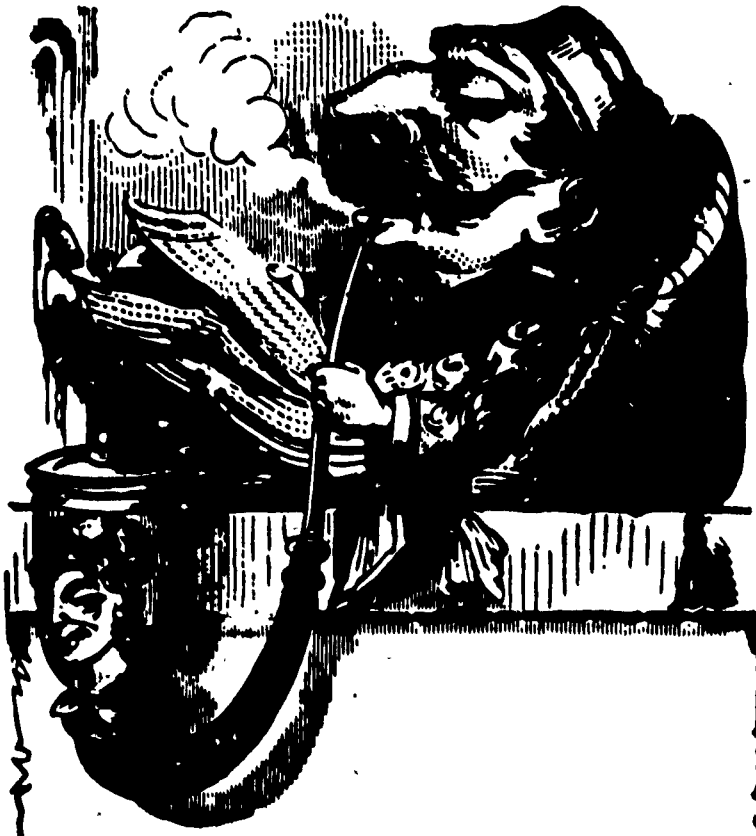


# Creating Pictures in Time and Space

*By*
*David W. Booth*

*"A picture book is text, illustrations, total design; an item of manufacture and a commercial product; a social, cultural, historical document; and, foremost, an experience for a child.*
*As an art form it hinges on the interdependence of pictures and words, on the simultaneous display of two facing pages, and on the drama of the turning of the page. On its own terms, its possibilities are limitless."* [2]

A product with limitless possibilities...An experience for children...In working with children, then, the picture book presents a wonderful opportunity for engaging children in contextual learning--not "talking about" but "being involved within". The words and pictures work together to synthesize a new creation which appeals especially to today's visually-oriented children. The age of the children seems almost irrelevant; the well-chosen picture book embodies those qualities of story and image that draw the child's own experience to the page and lets the child see and hear new meanings, negotiating between one's own world and the world of the author/illustrator. A group of children takes part in a shared reading/listening activity with a picture book, and if the children subsequently explore, exchange, and clarify ideas and meanings through talk and movement, a learning situation develops that allows for maximum experiencing, and the children make sense not only of individual responses to a book, but of each other's worlds. The child needs to describe this personal universe and to communicate with others. Adults have responsibility for fostering personal knowing in the children they work with by developing strategies for evoking personal response to experiences. The picture book can be the experience; drama can help the child make sense of that experience. Picture books open up opportunities for discussion and deepen understanding; the pictures draw the eye and the text catches the imagination.

## The Words

In selecting picture books to be used with drama, it is helpful to choose a story with a strong narrative. Folk tales or contemporary stories with folk quality are best to begin with. They help children travel to another time--an imagined past, an analogous present, an anticipated future. The words offer powerful language input for the child: story vocabulary, new and varied syntactic patterns, strong contextual clues for exploring meaning, characters who struggle with life's problems--sometimes symbolic, sometimes very real. The children are engaged in experiencing language more complex than their own.

By choosing fine stories as the basis for drama exploration, the adult working with the children can give them the power of narrative, with all of its encompassing levels of meaning, as a source for dramatic response: you can begin with a story that you know well, and find the power of drama within the story; you can draw on the vast resources of the story--its situations, characters, problems, relationships, mood, atmosphere, texture, and, especially, its concepts--as a way of stimulating and enriching the child's exploration in drama. Both story and drama demonstrate a concern for people--their values, their beliefs, the experiences they live through. In this interchange between drama and story, the child is brought into direct contact with a wide range of shared meanings.

## The Pictures

Whether the books are labelled picture books or illustrated books, their pictures provide visual input for the child, even for the non-reader. Picture books run the gamut of styles and techniques--water colors, woodcuts, lithography, photography, and collage; they illuminate the text; they extend the words into the possibilities of

*The picture book is a demanding medium, especially for older readers.*

meaning; they shock the reader/listener with new interpretations, lifting the child's own experience into different conceptual realms. The old is made new; the new is made relevant; the negotiation for the children begins. The picture book is a demanding medium, especially for older readers. Elaine Moss comments that:

> ...because it is of high standard artistically, it helps to develop a critical approach to the picture trivia with which children, adolescents, and the rest of us are pounded from morning to night, willy-nilly.[4]

As the artist has brought a personal reality to the words, so children can interpret the meanings of the art individually and collectively. The pictures do not hamper or imprison creative thought; rather, they give structure to energy; they lift the children's ideas offering patterns for beginnings, suggestions for bouncing against; they present shape, line, color, and proportions as hooks for contrast and comparison. The very difference from the child's view of what is read/heard and then seen, enables the child to see that difference for what it is, the stimulus for looking at one's own particular universe with new eyes. The children can create their pictures in time and space, using active drama techniques, just as another author/illustrator may take the story and present an entirely new concept through graphic design.

**Drama**

Drama involves people in some kind of struggle or problem; the action in drama develops as the children solve or work through the dilemma symbolized by the story. The children w from within themselves ideas and feelings and conclusions based on that story. In drama, the search for the meaning under the story structure is the goal of the experience. The children need to interact with the story and with their own ideas to bring about meaning, and to reach a strong level of emotional and intellectual commitment. Making sense of a story demands that the children apply their own experiences to those of the story. The adult must help the children go back and forth between their own responses and the story, translating the experiences of the story into the context of their own lives. Story represents a basic resource for both content and motivation in drama.

The story can be a starting point for drama, and the drama may lead to a deeper understanding of the original story.

The story can be introduced by the adult reading or telling the story, by a professional actor reading the story from a record or tape recording, by children reading the story silently from an enlarged text, or by a child reading or telling the story to a group. The story in its entirety can be read to the children either before or after its use as motivation for drama.

**Enactment**

In enactment, the children read or hear the story, discuss it, decide who they will be, when and where the story takes place, and what they are going to do. Then they begin to act and improvise the dialogue. The children translate the story into voice, movement, and space. Enacting a story reinforces the comprehension of the story, tying the printed word to the medium of the drama. During the preparatory discussion, the students focus on a gentle analysis of the story. In order to bring drama into a story, the students have to think about the meaning and the implication of the words, grasp the characterization, the sequence of actions, the setting, and the mood. As the students re-enact scenes from memory, they must recall the incidents in sequence as well as incorporate syntax and vocabulary. However, the emphasis must be on the context of the story and its narrative, not on insignificant detail. Enactment can result in a comprehensive interpretation of the story, and allow for a negotiated meaning between the author and the children. Through drama, the story is elaborated and explored for implications. The drama and ensuing discussion draw a large part of their content from the story. Using the words of others as cues for their own responses permits the children to test the implications of their own statements.

The Dream Eater presents an excellent source of enactment because of the five dreams repeated in the story. After watching and listening to the leader read the picture book, and after examining the paintings by the illustrator, the children in small groups begin to paint their dream interpretations in time and space. Using tableaux (frozen pictures), each group creates one character's nightmares. As well, each group selects a line from the story to chant as they title their creation. The leader, in role as the Baku, watches each of the dreams and the offers to devour all of the dreams at once if the five groups can create a single tableaux that incorporates the stories of all five dreams. After discussion, the large dream is shaped and the whole group tableaux is formed. Baku touches each child on the shoulder and the dream dissipates as the children fall to the ground.

**Elaboration**

After the children have read the story, the leader can have them elaborate upon the subtextual information in the story, extend the story back in time or forward into the imagined future, invent their own drama from

the implications that they see in the story for their own lives. A slight reference in a story can provide material for drama and demand that the children use their understanding of the story to create the unwritten scene. The children may be interested in the characters in a story, using role-playing and verbal interaction to explore motivation and relationships. The leader can add characters not found in the story and expand minor characters so that they become central to the implications of the action of the story. (By character addition and expansion, the leader can change the outcome of the story and of the drama.)

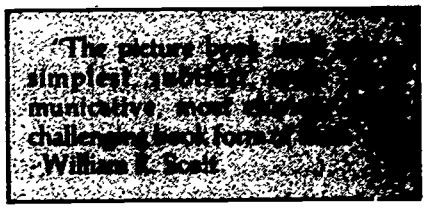
During the reading of the story, the teacher or librarian can stop at a problem to be solved or a decision to be taken, presenting various alternatives for action. The resulting drama can attempt to resolve the problems basic to the story.

The *Trouble With Mr. Harris* is an analogy of fair play--an examination of both sides of an issue. The grade six class in Detroit explored the problem of the responsibility of the employee, the employer, and the public. The teacher read the book to the class, stopping at the point of the town meeting. The loneliness of Mr. Harris as he is shown alone outside the town hall triggered the drama--the class created this meeting at the present moment. Each volunteer described the unfair action of Mr. Harris, being careful to describe the event so that it could be seen two ways--by the customer and by the postmaster. They told of packages damaged by the mail; of children being asked to play outside; of the post office closing on time even though there were customers waiting. How com- the sense of injustice as the role of the child and the story combined in the cause of fair play. The crowd agreed that the postmaster must be fired. The Mayor was role-played by Rick, a class leader, wearing his hockey jacket in May; Mr. Harris was role-played by the leader. After the town meeting had been held without Mr. Harris present, the drama began with the Mayor asking Mr. Harris to come into the meeting for an announcement. Mr. Harris requested a chance to speak to the townspeople before the Mayor's verdict was announced.

He apologized to the townspeople and asked for their forgiveness. Rick as the Mayor was startled by this turn of events. He had been prepared to fire Mr. Harris, and now, in his role as Mayor, he had to ponder the problem for several minutes. Finally, he stated that the postmaster would be given three weeks to shape up. Everyone appeared satisfied with the solution.

The search for picture books for drama is non-ending. I look for illustrations of power, of conflict, pictures that dramatize the words, knowing that the children will create other images from their personal meanings using the strategies of drama-in-education. The age of the group is not of great importance; the picture book speaks to most children. It speaks to the child in all of us. Its origins are in the cave paintings, in tapestries, in the stories of stained-glass windows. The drama helps the children see those paintings with stronger eyes and critical minds.

*In drama, the search for the meaning under the story structure is the goal of the experience.*




• *David Booth teaches drama education at the University of Toronto Faculty of Education and leads many workshops in drama and storytelling for teachers and librarians.*

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# The Medford Storytelling Guild: or "Volunteers, Unlimited"

*By*
*Pat Blair*

The Medford Storytelling Guild has a love affair going with the Jackson County (Oregon) Library due to the high degree of interaction between the library and the Storytelling Guild. Due to the enthusiastic volunteer support of the Guild, its members are not only of great value to the community but are a strong, vigorous public relations group for the library system. The Storytelling Guild has grown tremendously over the past eighteen years and includes individuals with diverse interests and abilities. And the Guild's activities and planning are completely within the library.

The Guild whose membership is now 360, is well organized and runs smoothly. For each project, there are a number of people whose primary interests are in one particular activity, such as: storyhours, storymobile; storytelling in the elementary schools; a reading incentive program similar to the "Reading is Fundamental" program of the U.S. federal governement (but funded entirely by the Guild);storytelling forums for educational purposes; or the Children's Festival which has been held each summer for the past sixteen years.

The great strength of the Guild is that people donate their time freely and give their talents but have few organizational obligations or meetings. The goal is accomplished, the evaluation made, and plans for the next project are begun immediately. In order for the group to function smoothly and to reach top performance, an impersonal, wise and available source of direction is necessary, such as the library staff. The library is the base of action for the Guild and everything the group plans. Because of this, the volunteers become fully acquainted with the library building, staff, and services available.

The Medford Storytelling Guild membership contributes in many ways. They are storytellers for the library storyhours, assist in craft projects, making puppets, doing creative dramatics, making costumes, baking cookies, towing the travelling wagon theatre, and/or taking an active role in the production of the annual Children's Festival that attracts over 15,000 children in a three-day period. For this huge activity, the Guild recruits over 2,700 volunteers from the community who assist in creating a wonderful magical world for children from ages 2 to 92.

The activities of the Guild have developed over the years. Storyhours, a traditional service of libraries, were already conducted when the Guild was formed. A committee of five volunteers, and the children's librarian, began planning and weighing suggestions to chart a course of action, and to develop ideas and ways to bring volunteers into the library storyhour programs. The group decided that since they were a small organization and very busy people that they would begin with limited activities. They concentrated on the library storyhour programs and programs for children in five local elementary schools on Saturdays. In addition, the storytellers went to the Headstart Kindergarten Center one day a week. The school storytimes were extremely well attended and the Guild found that most of the children attending the storytimes were transported from the more affluent parts of the city and that children who needed the introduction to good books and good literature were sometimes playing in their yards just a half block away. After the first year, the Guild assessed the program and felt that they had realized many of their goals but that there were still a large number of needs to address. First and foremost was to reach those children still not getting stories and the pleasure of good books and literature. Second, a new project would be a storymobile.

The Guild created a sectioned map of the city and divided it into fourteen areas. This, of course, required a recruitment of additional people to the

Guild membership. Coffee parties and mini-workshops on storytelling techniques and story selection where held and the required number of people for this undertaking signed up. Each Monday morning, fourteen storytellers hopped in their own cars and raced off to deliver the message that reading and stories are fun. Children gathered at pre-arranged storymobile stops on neighbourhood lawns and the storyteller stopped long enough to tell stories for approximately 20 to 30 minutes before continuing on to the next appointed round. The storyteller stopped at four locations each time out. As a result, fifty-six different locations within the city were reached every Monday morning by an army of dutiful, faithful storytellers...rain or shine. The attendance for the six weeks was 1,800 children. This project was introduced to the city because of the community's lack of public kindergartens. Now that kindergarten is an intergral part of the school district's curriculum, the role of Storymobile has changed just as the community needs have changed.

The Storymobile is now conducted from a travelling wagon ("The Pied Piper Theater") that was acquired through a grant from the Boise Cascade Corporation and is transported to a local shopping center mall and becomes the Storymobile for a six week period. Attendance now includes more than 2,400 pre-school children whose parents frequent the shopping center or come to the center expressly to attend the Storymobile's morning long sessions of story programs. Puppets, creative drama, storytelling, magic, and many other volunteer talents are used to attract the children to programs. Children are encouraged to borrow books from the Storymobile and to return them the following week. The library furnishes the quality paperback picture books and, while some are lost, most are returned. The lost materials are considered an investment in the future of young readers.

*The great strength of the Guild is that people donate their time freely and give their talents but have few organizational obligations or meetings.*

Another project that has developed over the past sixteen years is the Children's Festival. More than 2,700 volunteers present the festival while the Storytelling Guild is the organizational catalyst and nucleus for the project. Many local businesses support the project by donating funds or materials or by giving substantial discounts to the purchasing coordinator for volume purchases. The Guild is totally dependent on the community to assist in accomplishing the festival goal. Local service organizations such as the Rotarians, American Association of University Women, Parents For Better Nutrition, the Dental Auxiliary, Junior Service League and various sororities have adopted the festival as one of their projects and other volunteers from the community with special talents have given freely of their time so that the children receive a completely commercial-free atmosphere to experience the arts: in storytelling; in music; in the performing arts and drama; cultural and historical experiences--and all this without one item for sale, with the exception of food and drinks (which are purposely healthful and wholesome). The Guild can offer this festival for the small admission cost of fifty cents per person because the community is convinced that this program is completely selfless and wholly "for the children". The Guild has developed a working relationship with the parks and recreation departments of surrounding cities and the county and many children are transported to the festival as part of their summer recreation activities. The event is held in a county owned park facility and the county parks department cooperates by providing the proper park ranger control and maintenance. County and state police have assisted by providing adequate traffic control and local Boy Scout troops have adopted parking and litter control as service projects.

Each new project that the Storytelling Guild has developed has been in response to clearly defined needs in the community, including party storytelling for special occasions in the community, participation in the Learning Fair and the Medford Arts Annual Festival, and, as a community service the Guild has presented a Storytelling Forum which brings professional storytellers to instruct on technique for storytellers, teachers, librarians, and nursery school personnel and other interested adults. The forum breathes new life into a constantly changing membership.

The names and faces in the membership have changed quite a bit, but nevertheless the membership has maintained a large proportion of the original members still living in the community. These are truly "volunteers unlimited"--and the children are reaping the benefits of this valuable investment of volunteer time!

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